United Nations A/72/7/Add.44

General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 February 2018

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Agenda item 136
Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

Standards of accommodation for air travel

Forty-fifth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/72/716). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 12 February 2018.

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/272 B, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on standards of accommodation for air travel for its consideration at the first part of its resumed seventy-second session. The Secretary-General provides an interim update on air travel activities for the period from July 2016 to June 2017 as available from the Umoja travel module, and presents his proposals on the existing travel policy of the Secretariat. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that the report of the Secretary-General does not constitute a comprehensive report as requested by the Assembly.**

II. Information on air travel activities

3. In his report, the Secretary-General provides information on travel volume and costs by travel category and standard of accommodation for the period from July 2016 to June 2017, based on data from the Umoja travel module that had been extracted through the business intelligence module. With respect to the advance purchase policy, the Secretary-General indicates that overall performance for the period was 31 per cent, with the human resources travel category reflecting a compliance rate of 26 per cent (ibid., para. 8 and tables 1–4). The Advisory Committee was provided upon enquiry with the table below, showing updated figures for the last quarter of 2017 on compliance with the advance purchase policy.

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Table 1
Advance purchase policy performance, by travel category

Travel category	*Number of trips*	*Performance (percentage)*	*Average time (in days)*[a]			
			Submission	*Human resources partner*	*Travel and shipment approver*	*Travel-processing office*
Official travel	32 198	32	16.1	N/A	1.9	1.2
Entitlement travel	495	43	39.9	6.7	2.3	3.3
Human resources travel	1 382	33	21.1	3.8	1.2	2.7
Uniformed personnel travel	368	6	14.9	N/A	0.8	3.2
Total (weighted average)	**34 443**	**32**	**16.6**	**N/A**	**1.9**	**1.3**

Abbreviation: N/A, not applicable.

[a] All average times presented in the overall "total" row are weighted in consideration of the relative number of trips in each travel category. Weighted averages are used to account for the large variance in the travel volumes associated with each travel category and the difference in workflow steps for entitlement and human resources travel (i.e., the inclusion of a human resources partner approval step).

4. **The Advisory Committee recalls that it previously noted the low compliance rate with the advance purchase policy directive and encouraged stronger efforts in this regard. The Committee notes that the compliance rate remains low, and reiterates that stronger efforts are required across all travel categories, in particular in the human resources and entitlement travel categories, as most of these types of travel can be better planned by the respective offices for improved compliance. The Committee also reiterates its recommendation that future reports include a detailed explanation by travel category, particularly where there is a continued pattern of low rates of compliance with the advance purchase policy directive (see A/71/822, para. 18).**

5. Regarding the use of alternative methods of communication, the report states that the use of alternative methods has increased significantly over the past five years: the use of videoconferences has more than tripled, and the use of WebEx meetings has increased more than fivefold (see A/72/716, para. 27). Upon enquiry as to the correlation with air travel, the Advisory Committee was informed that, while the general decline in annual air travel expenditure appeared to parallel the increased use of alternative methods, a direct correlation could not be determined, as data were not collected when alternative means of meeting were employed in lieu of travel. **The Committee encourages the Secretary-General to collect data on the use of videoconferences and alternative methods in lieu of travel, and to reflect the data in future reports.**

6. The Advisory Committee was also provided upon enquiry with information on annual air travel expenditure from 2012 to 2016 at United Nations Headquarters, as reflected in the table below, together with information from tables 5 and 6 of the report of the Secretary-General.

Table 2
Use of alternative methods of communication and air ticket volume and expenditure, by year
(Number of meetings/tickets; thousands of United States dollars)

	2012	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*Total*
Use of videoconferencing[a]	1 318	2 507	4 963	4 219	4 645	17 652
Use of alternative methods for meetings[b]	1 773	2 659	3 019	6 011	9 485	22 947
Air tickets procured	16 212	16 283	16 988	18 105	19 724	87 312
Air travel expenditure	48 525	45 865	43 467	42 132	44 282[c]	224 271
Payments to travel agency	2 018	1 978	1 959	2 032	1 835	9 823

[a] Representing an overview of the number of videoconferences organized by the Broadcast and Conference Support Section at Headquarters over the past five years (see A/72/716, para. 25).
[b] Representing an overview of the number of meetings held using un.webex.com and Unite Communications at Headquarters and offices away from Headquarters over the past five years (ibid., para. 26).
[c] The Advisory Committee was informed upon enquiry that the increase in 2016 was attributed primarily to the temporary travel agency support provided by Headquarters to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, without which expenditure in 2016 would be at a level similar to that in 2015.

The Committee notes from the table above that, while air travel expenditure showed a general decrease during the five-year period (observing that the increase in 2016 relates to temporary support provided to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti), the number of air tickets procured reflects a continuous increase during the same period.

7. **The Advisory Committee reiterates that resources for official travel should be utilized judiciously in the interest of the Organization and that before official travel is authorized as a means to implement mandated activities, full account of its cost-effectiveness and the impact on productivity resulting from prolonged absences from the office while travelling should be taken into account to determine whether other means of representation and methods of communication can be utilized instead. The Committee also emphasizes that the primary consideration in authorizing official travel should be whether direct face-to-face contact is necessary for mandate implementation. In this regard, the Committee encourages strengthened efforts to increase the use of videoconferences and alternative methods of communication in lieu of travel. Furthermore, the Committee reiterates that consideration should be given to whether trips should be combined or undertaken with fewer travellers (see A/71/822, para. 3, and A/72/7, para. VIII.48).**

8. **The Advisory Committee also recalls its view that, considering the frequent official travel undertaken by personnel at the level of Assistant Secretary-General and above, any frequent-flyer miles gained by these personnel as a result of conducting official business on behalf of the Organization should be used for official travel. In line with its previous recommendation, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to implement such a programme with respect to official travel undertaken by personnel at the level of Assistant Secretary-General and above, beginning no later than January 2019, and to report back to the Assembly on the results of implementation at the first part of its resumed seventy-fourth session. Furthermore, the Committee recalls that it previously encouraged the Secretary-General to explore further negotiated discount agreements with airlines for higher discounts in lieu of frequent-flyer miles (see A/71/822, paras. 13 and 15).**

III. Proposals of the Secretary-General

Determination of the standard of accommodation

9. In its resolution 67/254 A, the General Assembly decided that, for official travellers below the level of Assistant Secretary-General, the standard of accommodation for air travel would be business class if a single-leg journey was 9 hours or more and would be business class for a multi-leg journey if the combined travel time of the journey was 11 hours or more, including a maximum of 2 hours of connection time, provided that the journey to the next destination resumed within 12 hours. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to modify his administrative instructions on standards of accommodation for air travel so that the duration of a journey would be determined based on the most economical route available, provided that the total additional time of the whole journey did not exceed the most direct route by four hours.

10. In his report, the Secretary-General states that the current travel policy requires the travel unit and/or travel agency to manually factor many elements into the calculation, with the result that the determination of the standard of accommodation and the most economical option is very labour-intensive and creates operational implementation challenges, including the inability to further automate the process, as these elements of the travel policy are not supported by airline ticketing systems or online booking tools (see A/72/716, paras. 32–35). Accordingly, the Secretary-General proposes simplifying the determination of the standards of accommodation by replacing the current, dual-threshold model with a single-threshold, total-travel-time model, which would provide that travellers with a total travel time below the single threshold (direct or indirect flights) would travel in economy class, while those with a total travel time above the single threshold (direct or indirect flights) would travel in business class. Total travel time would consist of actual flight time and actual stopover time (without the maximum two-hour connection time specified in the current policy) (ibid., paras. 49–52).

11. **The Advisory Committee notes that the Secretary-General does not propose a specific single threshold in his report. The Committee considers that the report should have included data regarding specific options for the single-threshold total-travel-time model for the General Assembly's consideration. In the absence of such data, the Committee is not in a position to analyse the proposed model. The Committee is therefore of the view that the Secretary-General has not made a case for amending the current standard of accommodation for air travel as decided by the General Assembly in resolution 67/254 A, and recommends against the proposal of the Secretary-General. The Committee expects that the Secretary-General will continue to monitor developments in the air travel industry, including on premium economy-class travel and enhanced economy-class travel where available.**

12. **In the context of the standard of accommodation for air travel, the Advisory Committee recalls its view that the nature of the work of the experts under the sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels is distinct from that performed under other consultancy contracts, and reiterates its recommendation that the General Assembly affirm their entitlement to the same standard of accommodation as staff members of the Secretariat (see A/68/7/Add.10, para. 100, and A/71/822, para. 7).**

Lump-sum option

13. In its resolution 67/254 A, the General Assembly decided that the Secretary-General should, as an interim measure pending the outcome of the review to be

concluded in 2015, revise the provision for determining the travel-related lump-sum payment to 70 per cent of the least restrictive economy-class fare, and requested the Secretary-General to include, in his report on the standards of accommodation of air travel to be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session, an analysis of the impact of the implementation of that provision and to make further proposals on modifying the lump-sum scheme.

14. In his report, the Secretary-General states that the rate of acceptance of the lump-sum payment option has decreased from the previously reported 93 per cent to 74 per cent since the implementation of the interim measure, with the remaining 26 per cent of staff opting for the provision of tickets and related benefits, which is a costlier option for the Organization (see A/72/716, para. 57). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with the table below showing the acceptance rates of the lump-sum option for 2016 and 2017, at 72.5 per cent and 75.7 per cent, respectively.

Table 3
Lump-sum option versus ticket option

	2016		*2017*		*2-year average*
	Number of travel requests	*Percentage*	*Number of travel requests*	*Percentage*	*Percentage*
Lump sum	4 806	72.5	3 898	75.7	74
United Nations-purchased ticket	1 824	27.5	1 253	24.3	26
Total	**6 630**	**100**	**5 151**	**100**	**100**

15. The Secretary-General also states that the decrease in acceptance rates from the previously reported 93 per cent is attributable to two factors: the reduction from the previous 75 per cent to 70 per cent of the least restrictive economy-class fare, and the removal of compensation for travel days. The Secretary-General therefore proposes that the interim measure be terminated pending the final analysis and proposals on modifying the lump-sum scheme to be submitted to the General Assembly at the first part of its resumed seventy-third session (ibid., paras. 58–60).

16. **The Advisory Committee notes the data showing a decrease in acceptance rates of the lump-sum option, and also notes that the ticket option entails additional administrative costs for the Organization. Taking this into consideration, the Committee recommends the approval of the proposal to end the interim measure, in order that the determination of the travel-related lump-sum payment would revert to 75 per cent of the least restrictive economy-class fare, pending the upcoming proposals on modifying the lump-sum scheme to be submitted to the General Assembly at the first part of its resumed seventy-third session.**

17. **In this context, the Advisory Committee, in line with its previous recommendation, also recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to take the steps necessary to implement a pilot scheme over a 12-month period, under which all staff would be required to use the lump-sum option for home leave, family visit or education grant travel, and to report back to the Assembly on the results of implementation at the first part of its resumed seventy-fourth session (see A/71/822, para. 21).**

Policy allowing for the first-class travel of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General when they represent the Secretary-General

18. In paragraph 61 of his report, the Secretary-General states that under the current travel policy, Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General designated to represent the Secretary-General on ceremonial occasions or to undertake missions in the exercise of the good offices of the Secretary-General under the Charter of the United Nations or resolutions of the General Assembly or the Security Council may, with the Secretary-General's approval, be provided with first-class travel accommodation, irrespective of the duration of the flight involved. The Secretary-General proposes that, when Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General undertake official travel to represent the Secretary-General, the standard of accommodation utilized be the standard applicable to Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General (the class immediately below first class) without any exception.

19. **The Advisory Committee recalls that it previously expressed the view that when Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General undertake official travel to represent the Secretary-General, the standard of accommodation utilized should be the standard applicable to Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General (ibid., para. 10). The Committee therefore recommends the approval of the Secretary-General's proposal.**

20. **The Advisory Committee also reiterates its recommendation that the General Assembly review the Organization's policy on entitlements to first-class travel, considering the developments in the air travel industry, notably that business class is now functionally equivalent to yesterday's first class, and that first-class sections have been eliminated by many airlines (ibid., para. 9).**

United Nations A/72/7/Add.45*

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 March 2018

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Agenda item 136
Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

Update on the proposed regional restructuring of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Forty-sixth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered an advance version of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Update on the proposed regional restructuring of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights" (A/72/720) (hereinafter referred to as the "update" report). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 14 February 2018.

2. The Advisory Committee recalls that the Secretary-General initially proposed a regional restructuring of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) within the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016–2017. At that time, the Committee expressed the view that a clearer and more detailed proposal should be presented for consideration by the General Assembly, including information on locations and geographical coverage; an analysis of the expected workload and a corresponding staffing structure; clearly defined reporting lines; and a detailed cost proposal, taking into consideration both one-time and recurring post and non-post requirements, as well as potential contributions from prospective host countries (see A/70/7, paras. VI.6–VI.12). In paragraphs 7 and 84 of its resolution 70/247, the Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee and requested the Secretary-General to present a revised proposal on the regional restructuring of OHCHR.

3. The Secretary-General subsequently submitted his report entitled "Proposed regional restructuring of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 48/141" (A/71/218 and Corr.1). In its related report A/71/584, the Advisory Committee indicated that it saw merit in the proposal of the Secretary-General to

* Reissued for technical reasons on 14 March 2018.

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strengthen the field presence of OHCHR and recommended that the Assembly approve the proposals of the Secretary-General, subject to a number of comments and recommendations. The Assembly, in its subsequent decisions 71/546 and 72/547, deferred its consideration of the proposals of the Secretary-General on the regional restructuring of OHCHR and, therefore, the report of the Secretary-General and the report of the Committee remain before the Assembly.

4. The Secretary-General has now, in the remaining months of the tenure of the current High Commissioner, submitted to Member States the aforementioned "update" report, which contains a revised set of conclusions and actions for the consideration of the General Assembly (A/72/720, paras. 26–29). According to the Secretary-General, the "update" report was submitted in order to: (a) update relevant information; (b) facilitate the related ongoing review in the context of the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019; and (c) also facilitate consideration of further developments in the proposed structure and approach to the regional restructuring derived from consultations with Member States (see A/72/720, summary). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the presentation of a new or updated report was raised in the context of the discussions of the Fifth Committee during the main part of the seventy-second session of the Assembly.

5. **The Advisory Committee points out that there is no specific decision of the General Assembly in which it requested the preparation of another report on this matter. Therefore, the submission of the "update" report raises procedural questions, including whether the report has been submitted under the Secretary-General's own authority.**

6. **The overall strengthening of the OHCHR field presence remains the basic premise of the proposal and the "update" report. However, the Advisory Committee notes that the "update" report contains post and non-post resource implications under the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019. Therefore, in the absence of a decision of the General Assembly on the substance of the original proposal of the Secretary-General, the Committee considers that it would have been preferable for the Secretary-General to present, if deemed necessary, a revised proposal.**

7. **Given that the original proposal of the Secretary-General and the observations and recommendations of the Advisory Committee thereon still remain before the General Assembly for its consideration, the Committee, in the present report, limits itself to some observations without expressing a formal view on the specific content of the "update" report, including on the actions contained in section V of the "update" report.**

8. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in the original proposal, the Secretary-General envisaged 13 field locations, comprising six existing and two new regional offices, and five subregional offices[1] (see A/71/584, para. 5). According to the "update" report, the OHCHR field presence would now comprise 12 regional offices

[1] Previously, in the original proposal, the locations and geographical scope were envisaged as follows: (a) strengthening of six existing regional offices: Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Brussels, Dakar and Panama City; (b) establishment of two new regional offices: Istanbul and Washington, D.C.; (c) maintenance of four other existing regional offices as subregional offices: Bishkek, Pretoria, Santiago and Suva; and (d) establishment of an additional sub-office for the Caribbean in Barbados.

but no subregional offices[2] (see A/72/720, para. 11). **As the "update" report does not specify the countries envisaged to be covered by each of the proposed 12 regional offices, the Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide to the General Assembly, at the time of its consideration of this matter, an updated list in this regard.**

9. The Advisory Committee recalls that in the original proposal, the Secretary-General indicated that each of the regional offices would require a core staffing structure based on workload and assembled through the establishment, redeployment, reclassification and abolishment of a number of D-1, P-5, P-4, P-3, P-2 and General Service (Other level) posts (see A/71/584, paras. 20–31). Specifically with respect to new posts, the "update" report envisages the establishment of three new D-1 posts (A/72/720, para. 17 (d)), instead of the previous one new D-1 post and two new P-5 posts (A/71/584, para. 22 (d)).

10. **The Advisory Committee continues to be of the view that staffing levels should be adjusted to allow for operational flexibility, based on actual workload, the specific needs of each regional office, and the available resources for technical assistance. The Committee expects that details on the forecasted workload, needs and resources of each individual regional office will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of consideration of this matter, including a clarification on the work of the regional offices and of OHCHR headquarters in Geneva with respect to technical assistance and with respect to the universal periodic review process (see also A/71/584, paras. 4 and 28–30).**

11. On a related matter, namely, the authority delegated to the regional offices, the Advisory Committee notes that the Secretary-General, within the context of his current managerial reform initiatives, intends to delegate additional managerial authority to heads of field offices (see A/72/492, paras. 66–79). **The Committee expects that clarifications on the issue of delegation of authority to the regional OHCHR offices will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of consideration of this matter.**

12. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in his original proposal, which pertained to the programme budget for the biennium 2016–2017, the Secretary-General indicated that the reallocation of post and non-post resources between Geneva and the field would be resource-neutral (see A/71/584, para. 32). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the "update" report, which would pertain to the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, would entail a reduction of post and non-post resources in the amount of $450,200 under section 24, Human rights. **The Committee trusts that detailed cost implications will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of consideration of the "update" report of the Secretary-General (see also A/71/584, para. 36).**

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[2] According to the Secretary-General, under the "update" report, OHCHR would have 12 regional offices, as follows: (a) Addis Ababa: Regional Office for East Africa; (b) Bangkok: Regional Office for Asia; (c) Beirut: Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa; (d) Bishkek: Regional Office for Central Asia; (e) Bridgetown: Regional Office for North America and the Caribbean; (f) Brussels: Regional Office for Europe; (g) Dakar: Regional Office for West Africa; (h) Panama City: Regional Office for Central America; (i) Pretoria: Regional Office for Southern Africa; (j) Santiago: Regional Office for South America; (k) Suva: Regional Office for the Pacific; and (l) Yaoundé: Regional Office for Central Africa (incorporating the current Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa).

Conclusion

13. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide further clarifications and details, including on the observations noted above, on the proposed regional restructuring of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the time of the consideration of this matter by the General Assembly.**

United Nations A/72/7/Add.46

General Assembly

Distr.: General
23 March 2018

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Agenda items 136 and 127

Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

Global health and foreign policy

Scope, modalities, format and organization of the high-level meeting on the fight against tuberculosis

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/72/L.40

Forty-seventh report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered an advance version of the statement submitted by the Secretary-General in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly on the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/72/L.40 (A/C.5/72/22). During its consideration of the statement, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with responses received on 16 March 2018.

2. Under the terms of draft resolution A/72/L.40, the General Assembly would decide that the one-day high-level meeting on the fight against tuberculosis convened by the President of the General Assembly should be held in New York on the second day of the general debate of the Assembly at its seventy-third session, consisting of an opening segment, a plenary segment for general discussion, two multi-stakeholder panels and a brief closing segment. The required resources would amount to a total of $59,700, comprising: (a) $49,800 under section 2, General Assembly and Social Council affairs and conference management; and (b) $9,900 under section 28, Public information. It is further indicated in the statement that no provisions have been made in the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 for the implementation of the requested activities and that it would not be possible at present to identify activities within the sections concerned that could be terminated, deferred, curtailed or modified during the biennium (see A/C.5/72/22, paras. 4–8).

3. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the requested amount represents 0.017 per cent of the $289,169,988 currently available from the total amount appropriated for the biennium 2018–2019 under section 2 ($311,579,400). As regards section 28, the requested amount represents 0.014 per cent of the $18,786,974 currently available from the total appropriation of $88,056,400 under that section.

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The Committee was also informed that it is recognized that the draft resolution calls for the engagement of the Office of the President of the General Assembly in support of the mandate and that, should it be determined that additional capacity were required to support those activities, resources contributed to the trust fund in support of the Office of the President of the General Assembly could be used.

4. The Advisory Committee points out that, in the past, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, as well as other departments of the Secretariat, have on occasion absorbed resource requirements arising from new or expanded activities during the course of a biennium (see, e.g., A/70/7/Add.36, para. 8). In this regard, the Committee is cognizant that, should resource requirements arise from further unplanned activities, it might not be possible to absorb them in their entirety during the biennium 2018–2019.

5. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to absorb the additional requirements requested under the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 in the amount of $49,800 under section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, and in the amount of $9,900 under section 28, Public information.**